

Statement of
U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Ranking Democrat, House Subcommittee on
Telecommunications and the Internet
Hearing on Digital TV Transition
March 10, 2005

Good Afternoon. I want to commend Chairman Upton for calling this hearing today on the digital television (DTV) transition, with its particular focus on consumer information and education.

Consumer education and awareness about the DTV transition will be critical for the success of any plan that ends analog television broadcasting. It is particularly troublesome that more hasn't been done already to inform consumers about the transition. Setting up websites with information is helpful, such as the information that the FCC has put up, but we must remember the context here. We're talking chiefly about consumers who don't get cable, probably don't subscribe to satellite service either. We're talking, according to the GAO recent testimony, about some 20 million households who rely exclusively on free over-the-air television, half of whom have household incomes of under \$30,000 a year. In other words, these are not likely to be people with computers at home visiting the FCC website.

In addition, we must also keep in mind the shockingly high number of consumers who continue to walk into stores every day and buy analog TV sets – sets which, to the credit of the manufacturing industry, typically last 15 to 20 years. In 1997, I offered an amendment to end the sale of analog televisions by 2001. That amendment was defeated but the FCC on its own subsequently – yet belatedly – put in place a staggered, dual “analog-digital” tuner mandate so that consumers buying sets would be able to receive digital broadcasts once analog TV ended.

Yet this delay in getting digital TVs into the market in an affordable way has significantly hindered our ability to bring the DTV transition to an orderly and timely conclusion. For instance, last year alone, in 2004, the television industry sold 31 million TV sets. Just over a million of them included digital tuners to receive digital TV signals. That means that last year, approximately 30 million TV sets were sold that had only analog TV reception capability. Let me repeat that – last year 30 million analog TV sets were sold. Those consumers who bought them were unlikely to have been told that the government intends, during the normal life of that TV set, to end analog television broadcasts. And they certainly didn't get any warning label to that effect in the box.

This year, even with the digital tuner mandate in place, the industry still expects to sell yet another 18 million analog sets. In other words, some 48 million analog sets will have been sold in the two years prior to the year the government originally targeted – as the year for ending analog television broadcasts. So even as we explore the possibility of warning labels, we have to recognize that by the time any bill passes containing that requirement, the bulk of the tens of millions of analog sets for which such labels are most necessary have already been sold.

Given these disappointing facts, it is with dismay that we see the TV set manufacturing industry petitioning the FCC to delay yet again, implementation of parts of the dual tuner mandate scheduled for this calendar year and to push it beyond the 2005 holiday sales season when a significant number of sets are sold.

Any abrupt end date to the digital television transition will be difficult to implement. Yet it will be nearly impossible if consumers are not informed of the government's intention to end the use of a technology upon which they may depend. For the elderly, the working poor, and for immigrant groups who speak foreign languages, the digital television transition may pose particular problems and contain greater risks. This timely hearing will allow us to explore these issues and again, I want to thank Chairman Upton for calling the hearing. I look forward to working with him, Chairman Barton, Ranking Member Mr. Dingell, and our other colleagues on these important issues in the weeks and months ahead.

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